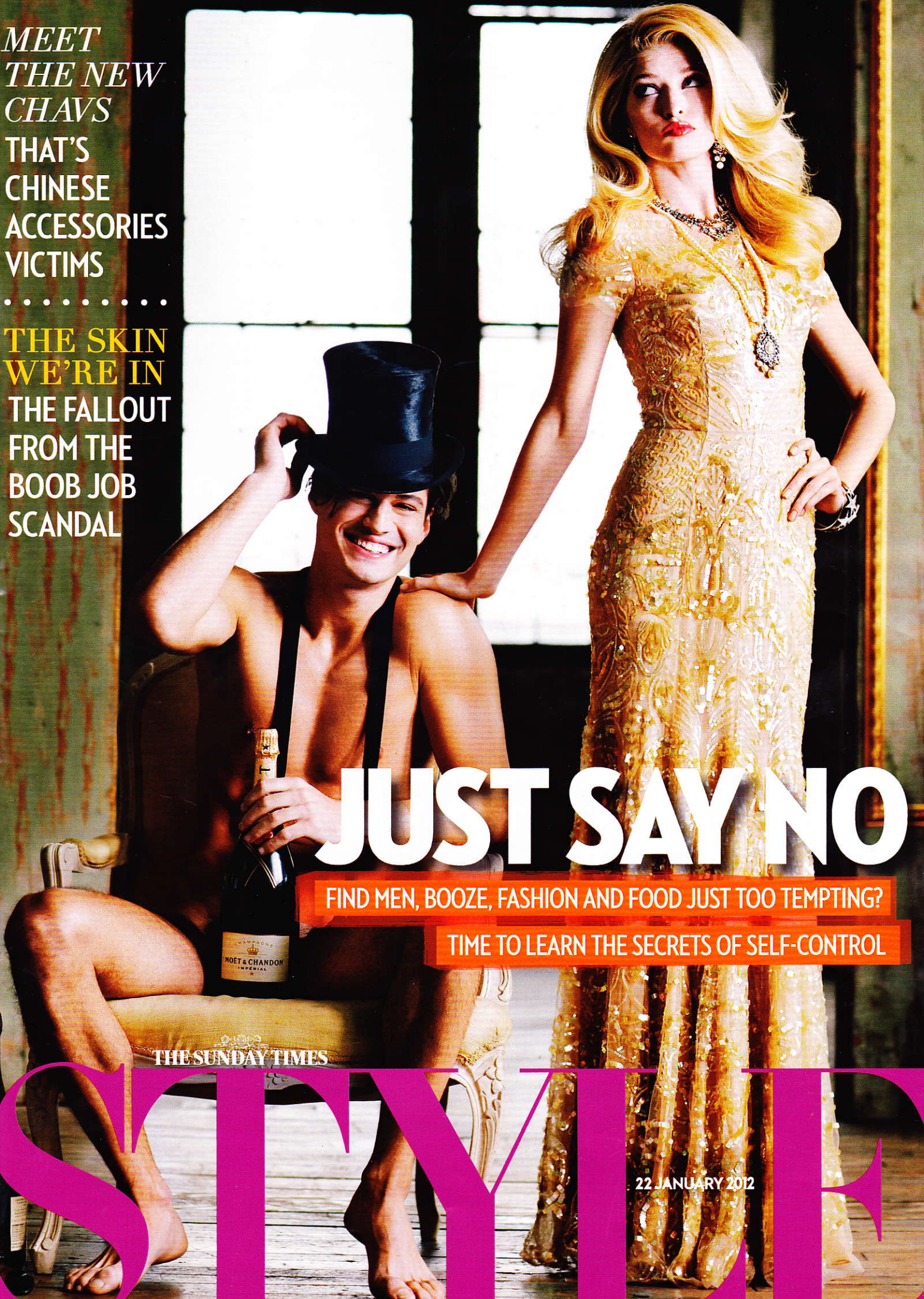


MEET
THE NEW
CHAVS
THAT'S
CHINESE
ACCESSORIES
VICTIMS

THE SKIN
WE'RE IN
THE FALLOUT
FROM THE
BOOB JOB
SCANDAL



JUST SAY NO

FIND MEN, BOOZE, FASHION AND FOOD JUST TOO TEMPTING?

TIME TO LEARN THE SECRETS OF SELF-CONTROL

THE SUNDAY TIMES

STYLE

22 JANUARY 2012

GOING HER OWN WAY

WHEN GEMMA BOND WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER, SHE REFUSED TO BE TREATED WITH CHEMOTHERAPY. HER DAUGHTER LAURA BOND EXPLAINS WHY HER MUM CHOSE THE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

Last March, Mum was sitting in her GP's office when she heard the dreaded words: "You have cancer." She was stunned. Having spent her life eating organic food, practising yoga and educating herself about alternative health, she never considered herself to be a candidate for cancer. She always knew that if it did happen to her, however, conventional treatment wasn't an option. The first thing she said to her GP was: "I'm not having chemo."

"Well, you will have to stand your ground," the GP replied, "because you're going to come under a lot of pressure." How right she was. A few days after being told she had ovarian cancer, Mum found herself in hospital having a full hysterectomy. The following evening, the surgeon delivered the diagnosis. Not only was it an aggressive form of cancer, but the cancer was also in her uterus. Mum was never given a prognosis — she didn't want to know — but the surgeon strongly urged her to have chemotherapy.

Through her tears, Mum managed to blurt: "I've made up my mind — you cannot heal cancer with poison." The surgeon was undeterred. The next day he returned to Mum's bedside with two other doctors. "Why don't you tell these people why you're not going to have chemo?" he said. Mum wasted no time. "My brother died of leukaemia in his thirties after enduring a hellish year of chemo," she said. "I'm not going down the same road." She added that she thought vitamin C or hydrogen peroxide injections were less harmful and more effective. "We don't have to stay and listen to this," the surgeon said, and ushered his team away.

In those first few weeks, Mum questioned whether she was being stupidly self-righteous. It didn't help that almost everyone — close friends, western and Chinese doctors alike — were all in despair. "How could you do that to your kids?" one friend said (us "kids" range in age from 20 to 30). At times, abdicating responsibility and placing it in the hands of someone who "knows best" seemed like the easier option, but Mum was determined to be a victor rather than a victim of cancer, and that meant trusting her body to heal itself.

Us kids? We backed Mum right from the start. Having grown up in a house where vitamins and homeopathy were used to treat everything from sore throats to broken hearts — and where it was normal to see Mum upside down in a headstand machine or supervising the dog's acupuncture — we knew the alternative cancer treatment route was the only path for her.

When Mum returned to her oncologist six weeks after her hysterectomy, he was amazed at her rapid recovery from surgery. "You're healing beautifully," he exclaimed. Six months later, he said: "Your results are so good, I don't need to see you again for another six months." Mum's CA-125 blood test (a marker for ovarian cancer) was 170 when she was first diagnosed — the normal range is between 0-21. Her most recent test, at the end of November, was 8. While Mum was elated, she was saddened by the oncologist's lack of interest in her healing process — not once did he ask what she was doing. We thought others might like to know, however.

Mum and I decided to start writing a blog (mumsnothavingchemo.com) about what it was like to say "no" to mainstream medicine and "yes" to vitamin C injections and ozone therapy. Through our research, we found there was a plethora of alternative cancer treatments. I discovered that in Germany a commonly

used complementary therapy for cancer is derived from mistletoe. I also found that there is a long history of using mushroom extracts alongside chemotherapy in Japan.

We braced ourselves for a barrage of negative feedback, but the overwhelming response to the blog has been positive and heart-warming. That's not to say there haven't been critics. Recently a man called Kevin left this comment: "I cannot believe you believe in all these snake-oil 'cures'. My dear wife had colorectal cancer and was given three months to live. We both knew that chemo would only give us more time together, which it did... I hope someone takes you to task and sues you." His words were full of rage, and yet his vitriol clearly came from despair. Mum and I decided not to respond. The following day, I opened my inbox to find this: "I am sorry I went off at you. Feeling very much alone."

Alternative therapies weren't the whole story, though: emotions also had a part to play. As the holistic guru Dr Norm Shealy says: "It's a lot easier to say 'My back hurts' than 'My life hurts'." Mum now admits that, prior to her diagnosis, she had lost her passion for life. Having invested the past three decades in her four children, she was left floundering when we started to leave the nest.

Ironically, cancer has renewed her lust for life. She is now driven to spread the word about alternative cancer treatments and has been invited onto numerous radio programmes to do just that. In blazing her own path, Mum has taught me so many valuable lessons: that it's worth standing up for what you believe in, that cancer can be a teacher as much as an enemy, and that finding a sense of meaning, amid the injustice of illness, is all-important if you want to heal. ●

mumsnothavingchemo.com

WHAT THE MEDICS SAY

Faced with a diagnosis of cancer, experts urge you to consider the overwhelming evidence for chemotherapy. Professor Peter Johnson, chief clinician at Cancer Research UK, says: "The difficulty with alternative treatments such as vitamin C injections is that there isn't hard evidence to back them up. Reliable, large-scale trials have not been done. There is little to go on apart from people's stories, which are important, but it's difficult to transfer information from one person to another. What's needed is scientific proof from big trials, which is why Cancer Research spends so much time and money on testing. Faced with great danger and uncertainty, I would want to take a decision based on the best possible evidence I could get my hands on."

He also advises questioning the evidence presented for alternative therapies. Check who sponsored the research: was it backed by a natural remedies company, for example? And consider how findings are presented and

the scale of the trial. "It's important people base these huge decisions not on belief but on objective evidence," says Johnson. "Make sure there isn't a vested interest at work in the evidence you're given and that it's presented as objectively as possible. The medical profession aims to make sure the evidence we publish following trials is as unbiased as possible, even when large pharmaceutical companies are involved. I don't believe the alternative therapy sector has those same stringent standards."

As for the idea that the medical profession is withholding evidence for alternative therapies, Johnson says this is "crazy". "Nobody wants to hold back progress," he says. "We willingly help to fund trials in any area where there are good grounds for doing it. There's nothing I'd like better as an oncologist than to be out of a job because there was a treatment that didn't involve chemotherapy."

Cancer Research helpline: 0800 800 4040

Gemma Bond, below, was diagnosed with ovarian and uterine cancer. Her daughter Laura, 28, supported her decision to use alternative therapies



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MUM WAS DETERMINED TO BE A VICTOR RATHER THAN A VICTIM OF CANCER — THAT MEANT TRUSTING HER BODY TO HEAL ITSELF

